

## Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board – Robinson Nature Center

June 11, 2015

Board Members	OES Staff	Other	
Ned Tillman, Chair	Jim Caldwell	Ed Wilson	
Cathy Hudson, Vice Chair	Elissa Reineck	Howie Feaga	
Betsy Singer	Kelly Dudeck	Bob Ensor	
Mark Southerland	James Zoller	Keith Ohlinger	
Olivia Farrow			
Georgia Eacker			
Chien Chi Chang			
Tom Paxton			

Agricultural/Local Food Policy Discussion featuring:

Howie Feaga - Howard County Farm Bureau

Bob Ensor – Howard County Soil Conservation District

Kelly Dudeck – Howard County Office of Community Sustainability

Ned opened the meeting and introductions and announcements were made:

- Ed Wilson, proposed new board member briefly described his background in energy.
- Sat. June 13th 10-2 Open Streets event at Swansfield ES. The idea is to explore transportation and how to make streets more walkable/bikeable.

Howie Feaga, a farmer in Howard County and member of the local Farm Bureau, made a presentation to group. Some issues that were raised included:

- Thanks for ESB efforts on the Mulch Task Force.
- It is a challenge to keep farming going, especially where residential areas continue to grow. There are issues such as sharing the road with vehicles that go slowly, and accommodating bikes as well.
- Farmers take nutrient management seriously and the use of soil samples has been a benefit and reduced the amount of fertilizer used.
- Change can be difficult and it's easier if it is gradual.
- Technology is also a challenge – new equipment and GPS can be efficient but expensive.

- Mulching and composting at local farms could reduce the need for landfills. Food waste is a big issue and farmers could help. Maybe farmers could collaborate with schools and others for food composting. Farmers need to be allowed to expand their businesses in ways that fit in to the landscape.
- Education is needed. The average person is removed from farming and doesn't always understand the issues. Need for more interaction between farmers and residents. Some local HOA's seem to have the wrong impression of ag preservation programs and the money involved.

Bob Ensor, Soil Conservation Service, presentation:

- Soil Conservation Service (SCS) with farmers and landowners to do conservation plans and look at the natural resources on the farm and what can be improved.
- SCS has design engineers on staff. SCS and farmers work together to develop 5-10 year plans. They look at water quality improvement practices, advise and help fund some activities. SCS manages cost-share programs to help fund some practices. Most farms take advantage of SCS services. SCS visits each farm a minimum of every 3 years.
- On education, SCS does presentations and the Environthon. Not too much education of homeowners about farming. Doing a presentation to Watershed Stewards Academy. Howard County schools don't have an agricultural education component. Only one of two counties in Maryland like that. The Extension service does most of the farming education. SCS does some get together for farms where they can discuss issues. Farmers rely on farm magazines to learn about new ideas and technology.
- SCS could help with transition from grain to food. Bob believes local farms could change from corn and soybeans to food production/CSA model.

Keith Ohlinger also spoke about some issues related to farming in Howard County. He mulches wood waste and was involved with the recent task force on that issue. Board members asked questions and there was some discussion. Some points and questions that were raised were:

- Howard County does not require a right to farm document when purchasing a home, but the Howard County realtors have recently adopted language that is included in all home purchase documents. This effort was a spin-off of the mulch task force.
- The current proposal for a 2 acre maximum on mulching won't work. Also, if outside wood is taken in, it has to be clean. Farms could take wood waste from the County landfill, but it is often contaminated with trash.
- Farmers need to diversify into other activities, and the neighbors should be accepting of these activities if they want farms to survive.

- The recommendations of the Mulch Task Force are with the Council and they will decide if there will be regulations.
- Farm Bureau is involved with local farmers? They have been helpful in keeping track of legislation and regulations.
- Farmers want to keep the details of their businesses private, not for public scrutiny.
- Is all of Howard County's grain going to the Eastern Shore? No, not all. There have been better prices elsewhere lately and also some grain has been switched to other crops.
- University of Maryland had a very helpful composting education program.
- Could solar be economically viable? The energy can't currently be sold for a commercial use if the land is in ag pres.
- Are there pattern changes in the weather? Yes, seems like there have been larger, more intense storms. The overall rain amount might be the same, but seems to be coming in heavier. Some waterways have gotten wider due to large storms. Downpours have been washing things out.
- Farmers need help with regulations. A lot of time could be spent tracking and dealing with regulations. Local farmers need an advocate in this area.

Kelly Dudeck, Howard County Food Policy Manager, presented information about Howard County efforts on Food Policy and Food Systems.

- Howard County put together a Food Policy Task Force. It took one year and the task force represented a variety of interests. They put together a list of recommendations and created the Roving Radish. The full report of Task Force is up on [livegreenhoward](#). Set of recommendations: short term, mid term and long term strategies.
- Creating a food hub and commercial kitchen were also discussed. Specialty farming, including adding value to products could have lots of economic potential.
- PG, MoCo, Southern Md., all now have Food Policy Councils but each has funding issues. HoCo would benefit from having a continued effort. It could be government or non-profit.
- There is a State level non-profit effort working on a food policy statement. Also some related effort coming out of the Governor's office.

- Howard County was the first to take on the Task Force issue and were making progress. It is inactive, but Kelly hopes that it will be “un-paused.” Kelly is leaving Howard County employment at the end of June due to lack of funding.
- Education is needed on how the food system is all connected. We need to show people how important growing local food is.
- Permits and regulation are also a big issue. An ombudsman could help farmers and other food businesses get through the regulations. That would help with expanding into to new products and ventures.
- More coordination with the Health Department is needed.

Ned summarized the discussion into 3 areas, education, Food Waste/Mulch remains a large issue, and how can we support and plan for local food.

Jim Caldwell provided a Director’s Report and there was some further discussion:

- The stormwater fee will be in the July bills and the County is adding a flyer in the tax bill to explain the situation.
- OCS had a recent meeting with Alliance for Chesapeake Bay to explore doing a forum or conference with a focus on agriculture, and watershed issues on large lots.
- There is a new head of HoCo Dept. of Planning and Zoning.
- OCS wants to build on the success of the Roving Radish. It may move to a non-profit, rather than continue as a government program.
- James Zoller reported that 50% of Roving Radish meal kits are subsidized. They could possibly get to 500 kits with 30% subsidized. Horizon and United Way funding will likely decrease. Need to structure the program so that it is more independent. Goal for this year was 125 kits and that was exceeded in the first week.
- Olivia Farrow reported that Baltimore City was recognized as one of the country’s most sustainable cities.
- Georgia Eacker let the group know about the meeting Bob Ensor is participating in. It is open to the public and sponsored by UME and the Watershed Stewards.